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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

Editorial Commentary

?Reconsidering priorities and alliances in the face of the explosion?

Columnist Fahd Khitan writes on the inside page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (07/17): ?As far as the Jordanian officials are concerned, an explosion in the region was expected, but the surprise is the confrontation started in Lebanon between Hezbollah and Israel and not between Washington and Iran?. The aggression against Lebanon has become comprehensive and destructive with Israeli bombs falling on Syria's borders. Syria threatens to retaliate without limits and Israel is ready for all solutions and is not planning to pass on the opportunity to settle all the issues. After all, Hezbollah cannot be fought in the south while Hamas is left a thorn in its side. The moment to impose Olmert's plan without any care or concern for the interests of neighbors or treaties might be at hand. What does that mean for Jordan? It means that priorities need to be revisited. The ongoing explosion in the region cannot be faced with proposals, projects and predisposed ideas. Trusting too much Washington's stand and the intimate treaty with Olmert are not going to do us any good on the day of the raid. Parties like Israel and America think only of their interests in cold blood and do not any care for the fate of others. There must now be a movement to create an Arab front that would be completely independent from the American-Israeli alliance in order to protect Jordan from the Israeli monster and to protect Syria from aggression and Lebanon and Iraq from division.?

-- ?Not Iranian?

Columnist Nahed Hattar writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (07/17): ?Linking between Hezbollah's conflict with Israel on the one hand and easing pressures on Iran over the nuclear issue on the other might, in theory, be logical, but this logic soon dissipates once we think about whether Tehran wants to hurry up the American war against it. The answer to that is no. The Iranian ruling regime seeks to strike a deal with

the United States and believes that it has some strong ace cards to play, including Hezbollah. Yet, Hezbollah becomes neither an ace card nor a tool if it starts the attack itself?. Hezbollah's initiative to attack actually stems from a non-Iran related motive, rather from the necessity dictated by the interests of the Arab Shi'ism which was detrimentally harmed as a result of Iran's pragmatic connections since 2001, the conspiratorial understanding between the Iranian regime and the United States in Afghanistan, and most of all, in Iraq, where Iran's expansion policy in cahoots with the Americans turned the Iraqi Shi'a from people qualified to lead the country into a 'base' for the American project. This greatly harmed the reputation, the capacity and the role of Arab Shi'ism at the Arab level, and led to the rise of the phenomenon of Sunni-Shi'a division that is almost

turning into a civil war in Iraq. The biggest loser from the Iranian policy in Iraq was Hezbollah?. The inertness, even political vacuum, at the Arab level, the possibility of reconciliation between Iran and America, the sectarian crisis suffered by the Iraqi resistance ? followed by the heavy Israeli strike against the Hamas government in the context of the Israeli project to liquidate the Palestinian cause; all of that was bothering Hezbollah and warning it of the possibility of strategic exposure and the decay of its position and role in Lebanon.?

-- ?Priority is for supporting the Lebanese government and protecting the Lebanese people?

Columnist Batir Wardam writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (07/17): ?The regional formula is quite clear. Lebanon is the only one that is going to pay the price. The Iranian President allies with the American imperialism in Iraq and opposes in theory in Lebanon, and declares that he is ready to defend Syria if it is attacked by Israel ? but he does not defend Lebanon, and none of those who got Lebanon into this crisis and cheer it on are going to defend the Lebanese people. The Arab stand must be stronger and more severe and must be directed at supporting the Lebanese government. Otherwise, all the keys to the game will end up in the hands of Hezbollah and the aggressive Israel and anyone else planning an escalation in the region. The Arabs must work hard against the Israeli aggression and the American foolishness in order to protect the Lebanese people from turning into fuel for a new war in the Middle East.?

-- ?The war has what is beyond?

Columnist Abu Yazan writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (07/17): ?We are before a war that is happening in Lebanon but its parties, accounts and fallout will affect the entire region, and will have what is beyond it in terms of results and affects on the balance of power in each country, specifically between the regimes and the Islamic movements, Sunni and Shi'a?. We are willing risk saying that the dust of this battle, once it settles, will uncover an effective presence for the Arab Islamic trend, Sunni and Shi'a. The Arab official regimes were never good at, and in fact have failed miserably in waging the 'peace battle'?. As for Arab citizens, mesmerized in front of TV screens watching the scenes of the great crime unfold in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq, they are no longer impressed by anything and their longing and thirst for pride, dignity and vengeance is no longer quenched except by the images of Hassan Nasrallah and the Palestinian and Iraqi resistance. Whoever listens to the bitter sarcasm by which Arab citizens comment about current events would realize all too well the widening gap between the citizen and the ruler?. I

wonder now whether the question "why do they hate us" will be asked by the Arab leaders, as the Americans have done following the 9/11 attacks??

-- ?Inside the box?

Centrist, elite English daily Jordan Times (07/17) editorializes: ?Not only the Lebanese and Arabs but any educated, broad-minded person equipped with the necessary tools that do not allow him to succumb to the mighty propaganda machine have, over the past few days, all the reasons to be furious at the coverage by major US networks of the tragedy unfolding in Lebanon?. Taking the notion of bias to new extremes, some newscasters have gone to the extent of censoring Israeli officials? declarations, omitting from their reports those passages that betrayed the brutality and disproportion of Israel?s military retaliation. Utmost effort is being exerted to present Israel?s attacks as specifically targeted against Hizbollah, even when bridges and airports are bombed?. All means, subtle or overt, are exploited to relay the magnitude of Hizbollah attacks and Israeli suffering, but Lebanese suffering and Israeli attacks are not treated in the same way. On one American news channel, the correspondent from Israel sported a thick bulletproof vest, while his colleague from Beirut was wearing only his shirt. It is immediately known when there are women and children amongst the Israeli dead. But the Lebanese dead are just numbers?. Yeah, American media are free. Free to parrot Israeli propaganda.?

?How do the Arabs deal with Hizbollah's 'adventure'?

Columnist Fahd Khitan writes on the inside page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (07/16): ?Hints of a comprehensive confrontation are looming in the region. People see in it a way out of the state of humiliation that has afflicted the Arab body, despite the pains and horrors that wars entail. The official Arab leaderships are almost outside the picture. There is talk, maybe truthful, about an Iranian interest in what is going on. But where is the counter Arab interest in all of this? In the current status quo and in light of the official Arab stand, Israel is the only beneficiary. What I want to say is that rallying public opinion around a stance that is skeptical and doubtful of Hizbollah's motives and objectives of starting a confrontation does the Arabs no good, unless the Arab leaderships provide a convincing alternative for the people in the face of the American and Israeli arrogance. The game of just and comprehensive peace ended up, as far as Israel is concerned, into a 'a Palestinian capsule' known as the state, as political thinker Adnan Abu Odeh had said, and freedom in Iraq after the elimination of the 'tyrant', as the Americans state, is an operation that is nearing a tragic conclusion for the Iraqis and the Arabs. In this scene, how can others be stopped from looking for a way out? True, what Hizbollah is doing is an adventure, and Hassan Nasrallah acknowledged that. The next weeks may see difficult days. All the players are egging for a confrontation that would be similar to the World Cup Soccer final. But can the Arabs do anything other than condemn Hizbollah and then Iran? If their action is limited to that condemnation, then Israel will be very happy with them indeed.?

-- ?The absence of an Arab solution is disastrous?

Chief Editor Taher Odwan writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (07/16): ?We have reached the stage of sorting stances and alliances, because Hizbollah's military initiative and the comprehensive war it started with Israel has put the Arab regimes before two options:

either support Hezbollah and practically stand in the Iranian camp, or stand by Israel and of course America. It is something that Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan tried not to be dragged into, as they chose to adopt a completely different stand, or a third option, namely condemning the Israeli aggression on Lebanon, calling on the international community to intervene, and at the same time blaming Hezbollah for the 'adventure', describing it as part of a regional scenario that does not serve Lebanese and Arab interests. Such an Arab political stand, which is completely different to previous ones vis--vis Israeli aggressions, is not enough, because it is a weak political stand when faced with the heat of battles and the sorting of alliances?. Such an Arab stand that refuses to choose between the camp of Tel Aviv and Washington on one hand and the camp of Hezbollah-Damascus-Tehran on the other will ultimately serve the American-Israeli camp?. What is required is an Arab solution that convinces the Arab people first and foremost that their countries are capable of protecting them from American-Israeli-Iranian aggressions?. What is happening in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq is the result of the vacuum in the region that was created by the Arab absence when all the eggs were placed in the American basket.?

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